

Message Text

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SUBJ: ALBERTA RESPONSE TO GOC ENERGY INITIATIVES

REF : OTTAWA 4213

1. FINANCE MINISTER CHRETEN'S CALL FOR POSTPONEMENT OF SCHEDULED JANUARY 1 ONE DOLLAR A BARREL OIL PRICE INCREASE, DEREGULATION OF NATURAL GAS PRICES, AND CUT IN GASOLINE EXCISE TAX WAS SKEPTICALLY RECEIVED IN ALBERTA. ENERGY MINISTER GETTY EXPRESSED WILLINGNESS TO CONSIDER OTTAWA S NEW OIL AND GAS PRICING PROPOSALS BUT SAID HE DOUBTED THAT "TINKERING WITH NATIONAL OIL POLICY ON EVE OF FEDERAL ELECTION WAS IN NATIONAL INTEREST". CANADIAN PETROLEUM ASSOCIATION BOARD CHAIRMAN CRITICIZED TRUDEAU GOVERNMENT'S DEPARTURE FROM GOALS OF CONSERVATION AND ENERGY SELF-RELIANCE AND ASSERTED THAT FREELY FLUCTUATING GAS PRICES WOULD DO LITTLE TO INCREASE EASTERN CANADA GAS SALES WHICH WERE LIMITED BY COMPETITION FROM RESIDUAL FUEL OILS. INDUSTRY EXECUTIVES CONTACTED BY CONGEN WERE DISAPPOINTED OVER PROSPECT OF ENERGY PRICE FREEZE AND CONCERNED ABOUT POSSIBLE OTTAWA-EDMONTON ENERGY IMBROGLIO. OILMEN
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CHARACTERIZED CHRETEN PROPOSALS AS PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL MANEUVERING AND LESS THAN SERIOUS ATTEMPT TO ADDRESS ENERGY ISSUES CONFRONTING CANADA.

2. PUBLIC RESPONSE OF ALBERTA GOVERNMENT TO GOC S ENERGY PRICE PROPOSITIONS WAS MODERATE BUT BEHIND-THE-SCENE REACTION WAS REPORTED BY RELIABLE SOURCES TO HAVE BEEN

ANGRY. LOUGHEED AND GETTY ARE SAID TO VIEW CHRETIEN S
UNILATERAL ENERGY PRICE INITIATIVES AS MAJOR BREACH OF
FAITH BY FEDERAL GOVERNMENT BUT THEY WISH TO AVOID
CONFRONTATION WHICH WOULD ALLOW LIBERALS TO CAMPAIGN AGAINST
OIL COMPANIES AND ALBERTA WITH OBJECTIVE OF CREATING
SUPPORT FOR CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES WHICH WOULD DILUTE
PROVINCIAL CONTROL OVER NATURAL RESOURCES. GETTY HAS
EXPRESSED ALBERTA S ACCEPTANCE IN PRINCIPLE OF FLEXIBLE
GAS PRICING POLICY WHILE INDICATING THAT FEDERAL GOVERN-
MENT WILL HAVE TO PRESENT CONVINCING ARGUMENT FOR ALTERING
EXISTING AGREEMENTS ON OIL AND GAS PRICING. OVER AUGUST
25-26 WEEKEND TOP LIBERAL OFFICIAL TOLD CANADIAN HUNTER
EXECUTIVE NOT TO BE TOO CONCERNED OVER CHRETIEN S PROPOSED
ENERGY INITIATIVES AS FEDERAL GOVERNMENT WAS LOOKING FAVOR-
ABLY AT SHORT TERM GAS EXPORTS TO U.S. AND TAX RELIEF FOR
ENERGY PRODUCERS.
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